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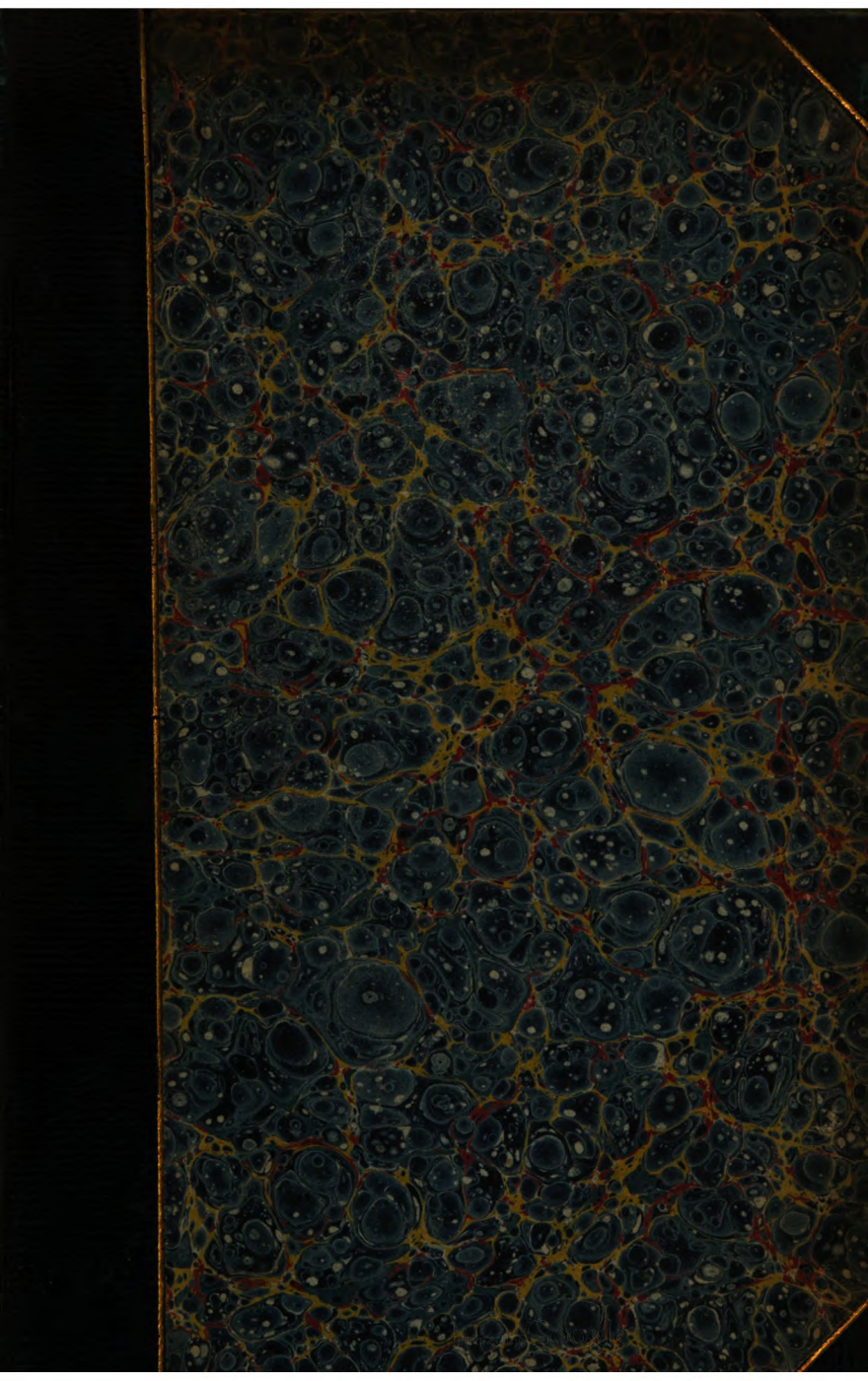
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3475. c. 6.

Papers on Catholic Worship.

No. I.

VESPERS, AND BENEDICTION OF THE MOST HOLY SACRAMENT.

To all who visit this church.

My dear Brethren,

The Evening Offices in this church consist of "Vespers" and "Benediction," (as it is commonly called,) which means Benediction "of" or "by" the Most Holy Sacrament. Vespers, as most of you know, are the Evening Prayer of the Church. They are made up chiefly of the Psalms of David, in Latin, which are chanted alternately, sometimes between two sides of a choir, sometimes between the regular singers and the congregation. Before these Psalms the Priest at the altar sings a few words, in which he asks for the help of Almighty God, and gives glory to the Blessed Trinity. Then the Psalms begin; each Psalm being prefaced and followed by what is called an "Antiphon;" that is, a short sentence, generally a verse of the Psalm it is connected with, which brings out the meaning of the Psalm, or directs us to that part of it which the Church wishes us especially to observe. This Antiphon is begun by one member of the choir, or more properly, by the priest, or one of the clergy present in choir, and taken up by the choir, not like the verses of the Psalms, alternately. You will observe also, that each Psalm ends with the "Gloria Patri," or praise of the Most Holy Trinity, at which, in honour of God, the clergy bare their heads, and the congregation bow them. After the Psalms follows a short sentence from Scripture, called "the Little Chapter," which is sung by the Priest, and then a hymn in honour of the day, with two short sentences, called "Versicle," (that is, little verse,) and "Response," or answer. These vary according to the day, and relate to it. Then comes the "Magnificat," or song of the Blessed Virgin Mary, with an "Antiphon" before and after. At the "Magnificat," the Priest goes up to the altar and incenses the crucifix and then the altar, in honour of the Incarnation



of the Son of God, to which the "Magnificat" relates, and of the Blessed Virgin, of whom our Divine Redeemer was made Man. The Priest and his attendants are then incensed themselves, also in honour of God whom they serve. The clergy, choir, and congregation, are also incensed. Then the Priest sings the Collect of the day, and any others appointed to be used on it. These latter are called "Commemorations." Before the first Collect and after the others, the Priest sings "Dominus vobiscum," which means, "Our Lord be with you;" and is answered, "And with thy spirit." Then the choir sing "Benedicamus Domino," "Let us bless the Lord," and are answered, "Thanks to God." The Priest then says a short prayer for the Faithful departed, and so the Vespers end. But it is usual when they are over, (except at Vespers sung by a Bishop,) to chant a short Antiphon, or Hymn, in honour of the Blessed Virgin, ending with a Collect, or prayer to Almighty God, acknowledging His mercies in the Incarnation of our Lord, and His favours to our Lord's most blessed Mother. All other particulars will be made plain by the Vesper Books, published by Messrs. Richardson, 172, Fleet Street, or Messrs. Burns and Lambert, 17, Portman Square.

When Vespers are sung by a Bishop, the ceremonies are nearly the same, excepting that the Bishop puts the incense into the "thurible" (or censer) at his throne, and not, like the Priest, at the altar, and that the "Little Chapter" is sung, not by the Bishop, but by a subdeacon present.

Sometimes Vespers are celebrated with the Blessed Sacrament *exposed*, that is, in sight of the people. Then all go on *both* knees on approaching and leaving the Divine Presence at the altar. Before incensing the altar at the Magnificat, the priest, on his knees, incenses the Blessed Sacrament three times. During the psalms, and those parts of the Office where sitting is usually allowed, the priest and clergy remain with their heads uncovered, and all present in the church should stand, although the priest and clergy are generally dispensed from this rule. If a sermon be preached after the Vespers, (except it be a very short act of devotion on the occasion,) the Blessed Sacrament is concealed by a veil, to allow of sitting. We now return to the more ordinary case.

The Evening Offices end (a discourse sometimes coming between) with "Benediction of the Most Holy Sacrament." This rite is far more difficult for a stranger to follow than the Vespers, because there is much more of silent ceremony about it. I will, however, endeavour to explain it, telling you also what it is and what it means. We Catholics believe, to our great comfort, that our Blessed Saviour is present with His Church in the Most Holy Sacrament, and this not only during a short time at the Mass, but that He continues with us as long as the Blessed Sacrament is in

our churches, that is, all day and all night long. At "Benediction," the Blessed Sacrament is taken out of the Tabernacle where it usually reposes, and put into a costly frame of gold or silver, (called a "Monstrance," or "Remonstrance,") and elevated above the altar, to receive the adoration due to Christ present in it. The rite is as follows: The Priest with his attendants enters the church, or, (if Benediction immediately follow Vespers,) moves to the foot of the altar, accompanied by lights, incense, &c.; then a Priest assisting, (or in default of one the officiating Priest himself,) goes up to the altar, opens the Tabernacle, or repository of the Blessed Sacrament, goes on one knee to adore our Lord, takes out the Blessed Sacrament, and adapts it (if not already adapted) to the Monstrance, or costly frame above-mentioned, places it on the altar, and kneels on both knees. Then he raises the Monstrance, with the Blessed Sacrament in it, to an elevated stand above the altar, and leaves it there, surrounded by lights, as on a throne of glory. He then comes down to the officiating Priest, who remains at the foot of the altar, and assists him to put incense in the "thurible." Then all kneel, and make a profound reverence, and the officiating Priest incenses the Blessed Sacrament thrice, as a mark of religious honour. In the meantime the choir sing a hymn to the Blessed Sacrament, and afterwards a piece of music on the same most holy subject, or on the Festival of the Day; but more frequently the Litany of the Blessed Virgin is chanted, in order to gain her help towards worshipping our Lord aright. At the end of the Litany, a proper "Antiphon," with a "Versicle" and "Response" appropriate to it, are chanted, and then a proper Prayer, although these latter are sometimes omitted. This over, the choir chant another hymn to the Blessed Sacrament, called "Tantum ergo," which may be found in all the books, with a translation. At the words "Genitori Genitoque," the Blessed Sacrament is again incensed. Then a "Versicle" and "Response" on the Blessed Sacrament, and the Collect. This ended, a veil is placed around the Priest, with which, having gone up to the altar, he takes the Remonstrance in his hand, (the assisting Priest or himself having previously removed it from the throne and set it on the altar,) and gives the Benediction of our Lord to the people, in the form of a cross; the server at the same time signifying by a bell that the people are to adore. Then the Monstrance is put back into the Tabernacle, the Priest and assistants come down to the foot of the altar, and all retire.

When a Bishop gives the Benediction of the Most Holy Sacrament, he is assisted by two Deacons, or Priests vested as such. Instead of taking the Monstrance into his own hands, it is given to him by the senior Deacon, the Bishop receiving it on his knees, and the Deacon kneeling after he has presented it. Instead of giving

the Benediction once, like the Priest, in form of a cross, the Bishop gives it in that form three times; first in the centre, and then on the left and right. Afterwards he gives back the Monstrance into the hands of the senior Deacon, who receives it on his knees, the Bishop kneeling after he has presented it. The other ceremonies are nearly the same as usual.

Such are the ceremonies of Benediction, but what is its meaning? For in the Church everything has a meaning, nothing is done for mere show and effect. I cannot do better than explain it in the words of another:

“It is our Lord’s solemn benediction of His people, as when He lifted up His hands over the children, or when He blessed His chosen ones when He ascended up from Mount Olivet. As sons might come before a parent before going to bed at night, so, once or twice a week, the great Catholic family comes before the Eternal Father, after the bustle or the toil of the day, and He smiles upon them, and sheds upon them the light of His countenance. It is a full accomplishment of what the Priest invoked upon the Israelites: ‘The Lord bless thee and keep thee; the Lord show His face to thee and have mercy on thee; the Lord turn His countenance to thee, and give thee peace.’ Can there be a more touching rite, even in the judgment of those who do not believe in it? How many a man, not a Catholic, is moved on seeing it to say, ‘Oh, that I did but believe it!’ when he sees the Priest take up the Fount of Mercy, and the people bent low in adoration. It is one of the most beautiful, natural, and soothing actions of the Church!”—*Dr. Newman’s Birmingham Lectures. Lecture vi. p. 245.*

I entreat you, then, dear reader, to bear in mind that the Presence of our Blessed Redeemer in the Most Holy Sacrament is the article of our faith which gives the meaning to the whole of these ceremonies. If you believe in that Presence, happy are you, for you know that it alone renders this life a blessing and not a burden. If you do not, at least respect our belief, or stay away from our churches. And though, as a Protestant, you cannot yet believe this sweet mystery, yet seeing how happy it makes us, you may well desire that you could believe it, and even this wish, it may be, our Lord will bless to your good. And depend, meanwhile, upon the prayers of

Your affectionate servant,

Advent, 1851.

THE PRIEST OF THIS CHURCH.

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Printed and Sold by Richardson and Son, Derby.

[Price One Halfpenny.]



